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Mathura Railing Pillars

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PRITHVI KUMAR AGRAWALA

PRITHIVI PRAKASHAN
VARANASI-5

The railing pillars of Mathura occupy a significant position in the history of early Indian art. To the student of Indian art they provide an almost unlimited field of investigation. This short study by Prithvi Kumar Agrawala contains an illuminating discussion of the pillars with particular emphasis on their aesthetic and iconographic imports. He has brought to bear upon this study his intimate knowledge of Indian art history and literary tradition and combines them to produce a coherent whole, authentic as well as well-organised.

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S. K. Saraswati
Banaras
Hindu University.

वर्ग संख्या.................. प्राप्ति-संख्या..................
ग्रन्थ-कार्ड
श्री गणेश वर्णी दि० जैन (शोध) संस्थान
ग्रन्थागार
नरिया, वाराणसी-५
ग्रन्थ नाम MATHURA RAILING PILLARS
लेखक Prithvi Kumar Agarwala

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Indian Civilisation Series VI
General Editor : Dr V. S. Agrawala

MATHURA RAILING PILLARS

Prithvi Kumar Agrawala, *M. A.*

PRITHIVI PRAKASHAN
VARANASI-5 [INDIA]

Published by
Prithivi Prakashan
B. 1/122 Dumraon Kothi
Assi, Varanasi-5.

First Edition 1966
As
Indian Civilisation Series VI
Edited by : **Dr V. S. Agrawala**

Price Rs. 45/=

Printed at
Manohar Press
Jatanbar, Varanasi.

To the revered
memory of my father
Dr Vasudeva Sharana Agrawala
late Professor of art & architecture
at Banaras Hindu University
and greatest of the authorities on
Mathura School of Sculpture.
Sitting at his feet this little chapter on
Mathura Railing Pillars
was written but who is now no more
to see it in the printed form.

This unassuming Chapter on Mathura Railing Pillars is a restatement in brief of what has been done by such authorities as V. A. Smith, J. Fergusson, J. Ph. Vogel and V. S. Agrawala in this particular field of Indian art and architecture. Its gives an introductory presentation of the motifs and scenes depicted on the vertical spaces of a number of rail-uprights which have survived from the Stupas once erected at Mathura in the Sunga and Kushana period both by the Jaina and Buddhist communities. A set of choice illustrations given here will be found accompanied by only a brief description of each of them, as they are already commented upon in greater details by the above scholars in their following works :

Smith, V. A.; *The Jain Stupa and other Antiquities of Mathura*, Allahabad, 1901.

Fergusson, J., *A history of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Vol. I, London, 1910 (2nd ed.)

Vogel, J. Ph., *La Sculpture de Mathura* (Ars Asiatica Series, Paris, 1930).
Catalogue of the Mathura Museum. Allahabad, 1910.

Agrawala, V. S., *Architectural Pieces in the Mathura Museum* (Vol. IV of the Mathura Museum Catalogue). Varanasi, 1963 (2nd ed.)
Masterpieces of Mathura Sculpture, Varanasi, 1964.
Indian Art, Varanasi, 1965.
Studies in Indian Art, Varanasi, 1965.

MATHURA RAILING PILLARS

Mathura is one of the greatest centres of Indian art, most prolific in its creations of art objects and at the same time unrivalled in its achievements of aesthetic standards. The golden age of this great school of art is coeval with the age of the Kushana emperors when favourable conditions, political, religious and economical, gave notable uplift to the art activity round about Mathura. Great masters of the Mathura school working in their ateliers with full inspiration to comply with the orders of their devoted and opulent patrons did produce for centuries stone sculptures and images in a large number which at one time really filled the whole of Northern and Eastern India.

As is shown by the ancient Yaksha and Naga statues from Mathura and nearby areas and the rich material from the Jaina Kankali Tila site in the form of architectural members of the ancient Jaina Stupas, there existed a flourishing school of art at Mathura prior to the Kushana period, broadly termed as the 'pre-Kushana' art of Mathura. No doubt, it was of respectable antiquity and coincided in time and achievements with the Sunga art of central India. Coomaraswamy analysed it clearly and remarked that "the school of Mathura is more nearly related to Bharhut than to Sanchi and is represented by some fragmentary sculptures which must go back to the middle of the second century B. C." In this phase of Mathura art, we have besides the tutelary deity statues which form a class by themselves, a rich mass of material in the form of Torana and railing sculptures erected round the Stupas both by Jainas and Buddhists. The railing with its various components was the main object of early Indian art for displaying both architectural grandeur and figural carving as is well known, for example from the embellished stupendous railings round the Buddhist Stupas at Bharhut, Sanchi (Stupa II) and Bodhgaya and at Mathura from the Kankali Tila Jaina railing.

The Kushana art of Mathura was the result of a vigorous art movement which burst into efflorescence in the beginning of the Christian era. It has to its credit an exceptionally rich production of innumerable sculptures in all kinds of architectural pieces typical of early Indian art, viz., Toranas and the railing and free-standing images of various deities. The best sculptures from the point of view of art in this period also are the female figures carved on the railing pillars whose buoyant and elegant forms count amongst the most enchanting creations of Indian art.

The railing just formed an enclosure round a monument now built in stone but on similar pattern to that of a bamboo railing; and appeared as a series of upright posts each pair of them joined together by three·cross-bars inserted in the mortices cut into the narrower sides of the pillars, and held in position on top by the copings and at bottom by the base-stones held by the similar mortice-and-tenon device.

In the beginning, when *anda* or the main hemispherical body of the Stupa was plain, it, however, provided no opportunity for sculptors to show their decorative skill. So it was quite natural for them to devote their full attention to the peripheral railing and Torana and, in fact, they embellished the railing and gateways with exquisite figure-sculpture; and made them, in some cases, no doubt, "an epic in stone". The railing which once was erected round the Bharhut Stupa, or the No. 2 Stupa at Sanchi, provides such an example.

Unfortunately no complete Stupa at Mathura was found standing or was traceable to its original form, but discreet members which certainly formed part of the railings and Toranas were found and published from time to time. As Fergusson wrote : "When excavating at Mathura, General Cunningham found several pillars of a rail, which judging from the style, is probably later than that at Bharhut, but still certainly anterior to the Christian Era. The pillars, however, are only 4½ ft. high, and few traces of the top rail or of the intermediate discs have been found. Each pillar is adorned by a figure of a nude female in high relief, singularly well executed, richly adorned with necklaces and bangles, and a bead belt or truss around their middles. Each stands on a crouching dwarf or demon, and above each, in a separate compartment, are the busts of two figures, a male and female on a somewhat smaller scale, either making love to each other, or drinking something stronger than water."

On the basis of certain undoubted evidence, it is usually agreed by scholars that this rail belonged to "one or more Jaina Stupas such as that of which the remains were excavated by Dr Fuhrer in 1888-89".[1] The main explorations of the Kankali mound by Fuhrer were conducted in the three seasons of 1888-89, 1889-90 and 1890-91, as a result of which the great bulk of Mathura antiquities, mainly Jaina, was collected.

There is hardly any doubt that the Mathura architects were working in the same tradition as those at Bharhut. As the inscriptional evidence and the art styles show there were at least two Stupas at Mathura built by the Jainas, one of early Sunga age and the second of Kushana period. The two Buddhist Stupas also, one built in the reign of Huvishka and another traced at the Buteshwar Tila, at Mathura, followed the same structural traditions and similar scheme of decoration.[1] Though, at some later date, these several Mathura Stupas were demolished by some ruthless agencies, the remaining pieces of the railing-pillars, cross-bars and copings recovered from the ruins, show the highest decorative skill 'and a perfection of plastic art not attained at any time before and after.'

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[1] Smith, V. A., *Mathura Antiquities*, pp. 2-4.

There is perhaps no better analysis and appraisal of the carvings of Mathura railing than what Dr V. S. Agrawala offers in his latest study on the subject.

"There are two types of railing clearly distinguished at Mathura. An earlier one marked by several features, viz., 1. profusion of lotus designs in medallions, 2. the number of medallions which is generally three in the middle and one half each above and below, 3. levelling of square edges to convert them into octagonal form (*atthamsika*), 4. absence of human or divine figures on pillars, 5. absence of human heads inside cross-bar medallions as are found at Bharhut, 6. carving in low relief. These features distinguish the railing the remains of which belong to the earlier Jaina Stupa at Kankali Tila. From an account in the *Rayapaseniya Sutta* we know that this kind of railing was styled *Padmavaravedika* ...

"The style of Mathura railing gives some indication of its very early date. The carving is all in low relief which is near to wooden prototypes. There is a want of human figures in alto-relievos.... The Jaina tradition of the building of the *Devanirmita Stupa* also assigns it to very early times, and it is likely that the Stupa and the railing were put up in the 3rd century B. C.

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[1] Agrawala, V. S., *Indian Art* (Varanasi, 1965), pp. 218-9

"The architecture of the Stupa and the railing found its own development at Mathura of which we find profuse evidence for the Kushana period....the Stupas became elongated in forms... But the railing underwent the greatest change as shown by the following features : the pillars are square in section, they are generally divided into three sections on the front side, viz., a prominent male or female figure in the middle portion carved in bold relief, a crouching dwarf (*guhyaka*) below, and a projecting terrace often with human figures above. The human figures combine several traditions, viz., that of Yakshas and Yakshis as at Bharhut, heavenly girls (*devakumarikas*) whose presence was necessary in a Stupa, and that of women in social pastimes, donors and worshippers in *anjalimudra*, and of divine figures. The pillars are decorated on their back with several Jataka scenes, e. g. Sibi Jataka, Vyaghri J., Kachchhapa J., Uluka J., Valahassa J."[1]

But the real charm of these Mathura railing pillars are the female figures conceived in various heart-bewitching poses and forms. In fact, the Mathura masters utilised the vertical spaces available on the face of rail uprights to make their art as much delicately beautiful as it could be. And in doing so they did not mar the aesthetic aexcellence of their subject

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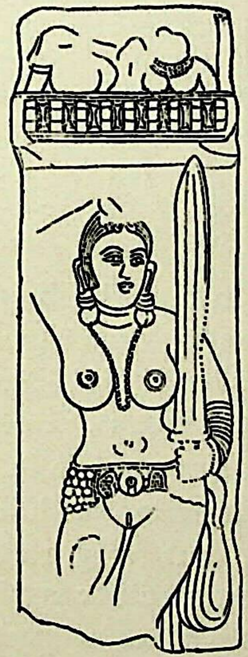
1. *Ibid.*, p. 223-4

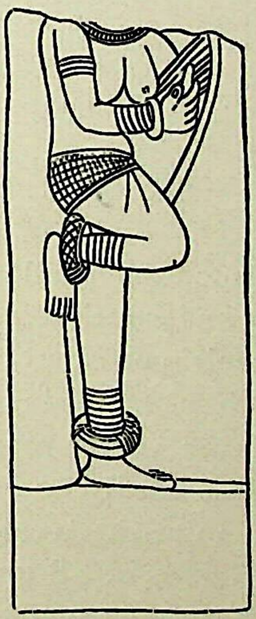
through a carnal approach, but 'evince a respect and restraint which does not permit works of art to be degraded into scenes of mere sensuous narration.' They portrayed female beauty in various dramatic and attractive poses, engaged in their favourite sports and pastimes and in a variety of sketches of contemporary womanly life. In art terminology, these female figures were named as *Salabhanjika*, a term which originally denoted the motif of 'the woman plucking (and gathering) *sala* flowers by standing under a blossoming *Sala* tree'.

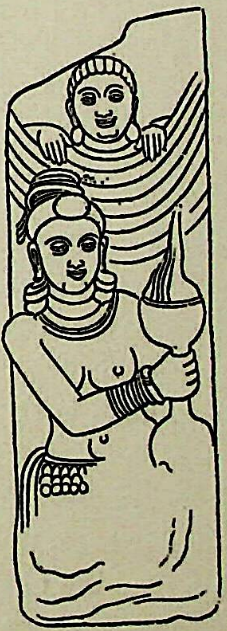
A graphic description of such females, as actually found on Jaina and Buddhist railings at Mathura, is provided by the Jaina *Rayapaseniya Sutta*, according to which on each side there usually existed sixteen railing uprights, thus giving a total of sixtyfour for the entire railing. Prof. V. S. Agrawala, who for the first time drew our attention to this valuable account, rightly comments that "this fact with respect to the beauty of the female figures was noticed even in ancient times showing that the art-connoisseurs also were conscious of this supreme fact which has made the Kushana art of Mathura such a loving subject in the eyes of modern critics." The original text says :

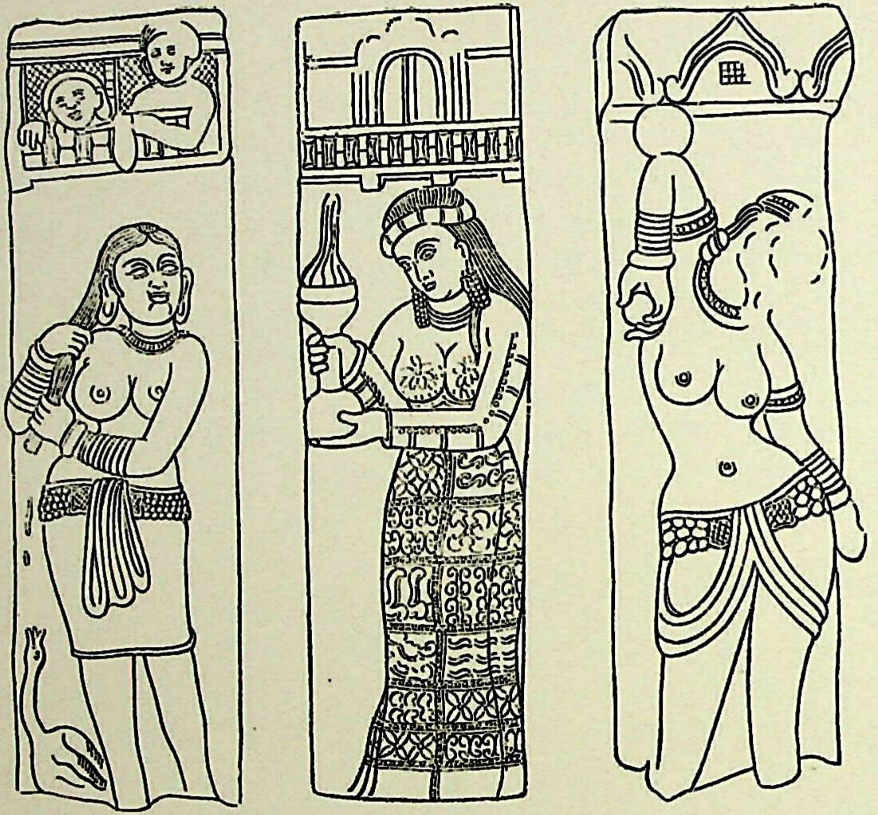
> The *salabhanjika* women carved on the *vedika* pillars were standing in various graceful poses, well supported (on crouchant figures), beautifully ornamented, wearing garments painted in various hues, and necklaces of various designs, slenderwaisted, having round prominent breasts, eyes with red corners and black curly hair, standing under Asoka trees and holding their distended boughs, stealing the hearts of the gods as it were with their rolling glances and teasing as it were with play of their eyes.

This description is aptly applicable to the actual railing pillar specimens of the Kushana period from both Jaina and Buddhist Stupa enclosures. And, this really was the secret which made railing still cherished with attention for figure-carving, though gradually it was becoming less and less popular when images of Buddha-Bodhisattva, Tirthankara and Brahmanical divinities had occupied attention of the sculptor. Indeed it went out of fashion during the Gupta period and in some of the cases, in temples, it was merged in the plinth; or the *Salabhanjika* theme was transferred from the carved balusters of *vedikas* to the door-jambs and *mandapa* pillars of temples and palaces.









The sculptors devoted their full skill in embellishing the various parts of railing and especially pillars with such motifs and scenes in which people took interest. As such the Mathura railing, both early and Kushana, Jaina and Buddhist, presents a graphic account of the contemporary human life in its various spheres. They are hardly to be connected with any particular sect, unless an upright is carved, but very rarely, with a Buddha or deity figure, or a Stupa or such other symbol. Truly one sees here 'preserved in stone sketches of contemporary life showing men and women engaged in their favourite sports and pastimes, dance and music which reveal their joyous outlook on life and testify to their faith in a creed of freedom and sunshine.' On Sunga and Kushana railing uprights from Mathura, the most welcome poses and sports in which young women are shown engaged emphasise on the positive side of life, with deeper stirrings of effeminate charms and delicacy, and may be pointed out below.

(1) Female standing under an *asoka* tree and gathering its flowers (*asokapushpaprachayika*);
(2) female kicking an *asoka* tree with her (left) foot to make it blossom (*asokadohada*);
(3) female standing under an *asoka* tree, or a *kadamba* tree. She bears a cup in J 9.
(4) Female with lotus flower or bunch of flowers in her hand;
(5) female playing with ball (*kanduka krida*);
(6) female in dancing poses;
(7) female playing on a harp which shell-plastron;
(8) female feeding a parrot (*sukasarika*);
(9) female taking bath under a precipice;
(10) female drying her hair after bath;
(11) female looking into a mirror;
(12) female adjusting her ear-pendant by looking into a mirror;
(13) female arranging her hair by looking into a mirror;
(14) female putting on her necklace, or unloosing it;
(15) *prasadhana* (shown in a series of scenes carved on pillar);
(16) nude female unloosing her scarf from breasts;
(17) female unloosing her lower garment from hip;
(18) female unloosing her girdle;
(19) female attendant with *prasadhana-samagri;*

(20) female *pratihari* attendent with sword;

(21) female in the pose of pressing her breast with hand, or in the milk-bestowing posture;

(22) female fondling a child; etc.

Certain Buddhist Jatakas recognised are : Mahabodhi Jataka (J 2), Vessantara J. (J 4), Vyaghri J. (J. 5), Alambusa J. (J 7), Kachchhapa J. (J 36), Uluka J. (J 41), Vanara J. (J 42; 195), Padakusalamanava J. (191), J. of the Worst Evil (586). Some improtant figures and symbols on the railing may also be noted, e. g. Buddha (195, 2524), or Bodhisattva (J 18, 1250), drum-beater Yaksha (1330), Indra (1616), Panchasikha Gandharva (2357), Scythian soldier, and sacred tree (J 61; 2663), Stupa (J 10; J 11; J 45; J 61; J 71), Dharmachakra (438), towered temple (J 24); etc.

Salabhanjika

As could be gathered from the passage quoted above from the *Rayapaseniya Sutta*, the term *Salabhanjika* was used in a description of the Stupa railing for such female figures shown in various dramatic poses on the uprights. The term *Salabhanjika*, at first sight, appears to have not much connection with this meaning similar to which we also get recorded by the later Sankrit lexicons where the meaning of *Salabhanjika* is usually given as 'a statue'. In its etymological meaning it denotes the act of plucking (*bhanjika*) *Sala* flowers (*Vatica robusta)*, and in early literature it also signifies the festival of plucking (and gathering) *Sala* flowers, as in the *Nidana Katha* and the *Avadanasataka* (Story No. 55). But how it came to mean 'a female figure' or statue is not difficult to explain. As has been elucidated by Dr Vogel, "We shall first have to assume that the word *Salabhanjika* originally denoted not only the festival of *Sala* flower gathering but, also the women who took part in it."[1]

Subsequently, it assumed a more technical meaning, and sportive women engaged in various pastimes, especially shown in art, were implied by the term.

Dr Vogel remarked, "Such figures which are first met with on the *toranas* of the Stupas of Bharhut, are especially frequent on the railing pillars of Mathura. May we not assume that to these pillar figures the term *Salabhanjika* was applied ? It is true that the trees under which these figures are placed, do not appear to be invariably meant to render the *Sala* tree. But it is quite natural that the *Salabhanjika*, 'the women breaking the *Sala* bough' ... was adopted as a technical term to designate in general any carving of a female seizing the branch of a tree. Gradually, as the etymological meaning of the word was no longer remembered, the use of the word was still further extendend and it was applied to any female image carved on a pillar".[2]

As is clear from the passage of the *Rayapaseniya* and other Jaina Sutras also, there should be no doubt that the term '*salabhanjika*' was, in fact, used by the authors of these texts for the beautiful female figures on the pillars of a Stupa railing. Actual specimens of it have come from Mathura of the Sunga and Kushana times.

It is stated in the *Rayapaseniya Sutta* that the doors were carved with charming figures of Salabhanjika women (*lilathiyasalabhanjiya*), as well as designs of fabulous animals (*vyalarupa*). But the depiction of a pair of females on either side of the door appears to be an ancient practice. Should it not be regarded that the several descriptions of the "Door-goddesses" in the *Rigveda* refer to the similar representation ?

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[1] Vogel, "The Woman-and-Tree or Salabhanjika in Indian Literature and Art", *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. VII, pp. 201-31.

[2] *Ibid.*

"The shining divinities of the door with its frames are much more glorified with the preparation of Pavamana Soma...who longs for the great (*mahi*) lofty pair of well-carved beautiful maidens (i. e. door-figures) like Night and Dawn."[1] (RV. IX. 5. 5.)

See also RV. X. 110. 5.

But how far it is justified to connect these pure literary references, of which purport is also not so illustrative, with the prototypes of railing-Salabhanjika figures in the present state of our knowledge, one cannot ascertain. But, as Dr Vogel admits, "there cannot be the slightest doubt that these figures are derived from the images decorating the *toranas* of Bharhut," and broadly speaking from the early school of Central India where their tradition must have been of greater antiquity than the sculptural examples known to us. He confidently concluded in his illuminating article on this motif that "the *salabhanjika* is a truly indigenous element of decorative art, which can be shown to have taken its root from a festival customary in ancient India."[2]

[1] It is implied in the *mantra* that wherever Soma is squeezed that doors i. e. house is much more glorified because of the Soma preparation. And Soma likewise wishes a place for its preparation where beautiful maidens are carved on the lofty doors, namely of richman's house,

[2] *Op cit.*, p. 231.

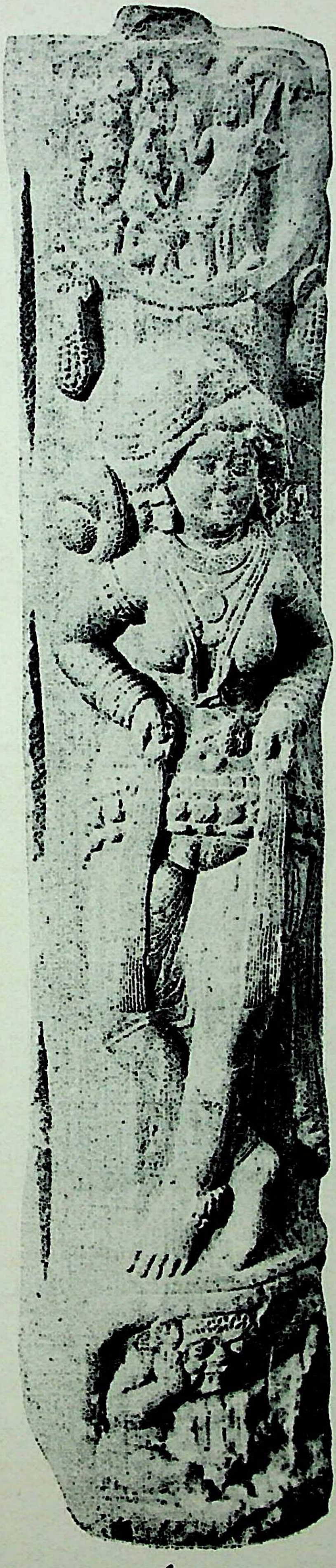
PLATES

1

The female on a pot-bellied squatting dwarf with protruding eyes and erect ears *(sanku-karna)*. She appears to be clad in a *dhoti* but that is transparent as revealing her nudity. The young lady with prominent ornaments, elaborate coiffure, round earrings, several necklaces, armlets, bracelets, girdle and anklets is depicted grasping the two ends of an elaborately embroidered scarf passing round her back and falling loosely in front of her thighs. She seems to demonstrate some graceful attitude of dancing.

The upper medallion contains a scene in which there are a distinguished teacher holding a parasol and seven other persons in front of him perhaps listening to his discourse. For the identification of the story, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, JAOS, Vol. 51, p. 56 ; V. S. Agrawala, *Mathura Museum Catalogue*, Vol. IV, pp.4-5.

Mathura Museum, No. J 2. The pillar is in a style which resembles that at Bharhut and apparently belongs to the Sunga period. Find-place unknown. Ht. 6′ 5″.



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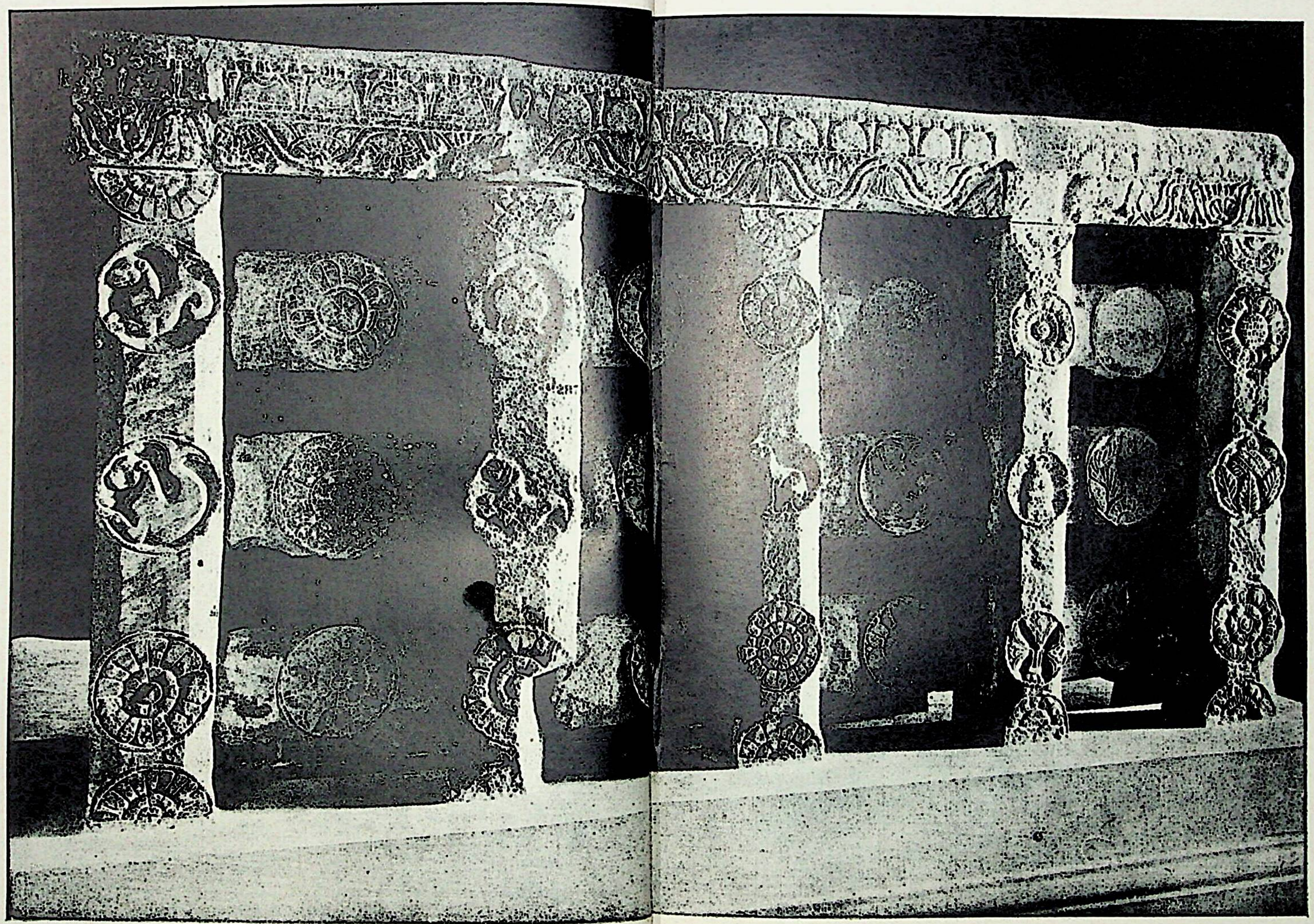
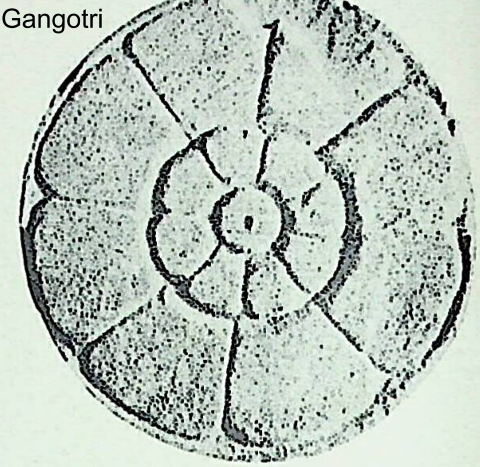
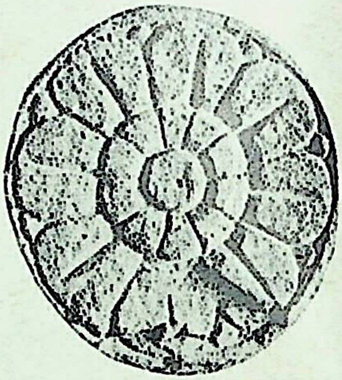
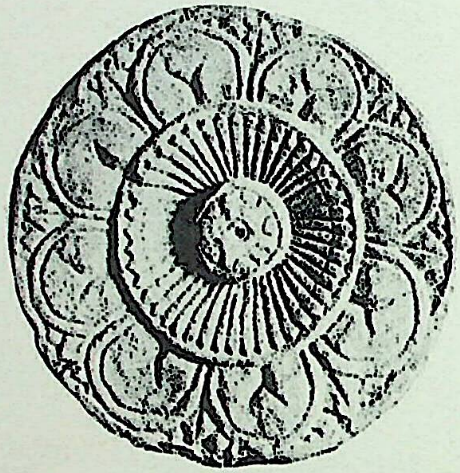
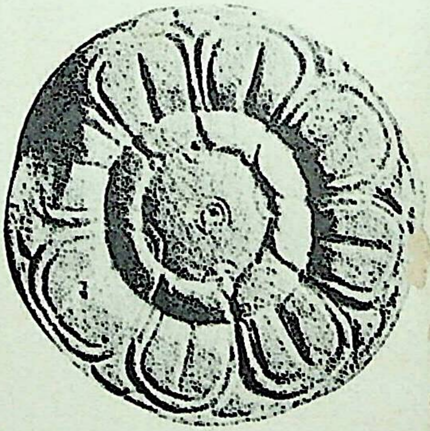


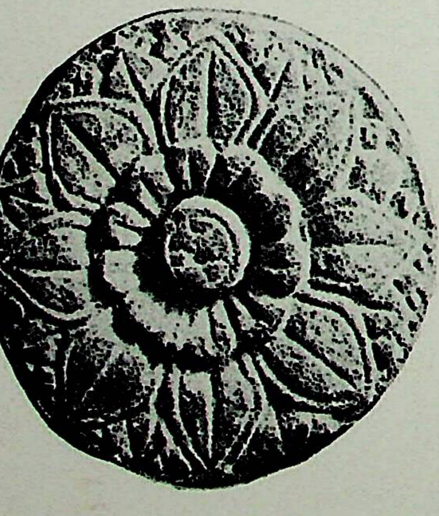
2 The "Lotus Railing" Padmavara Vedikā as recoructed inside the Lucknow Museum. Śunga Period.











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3

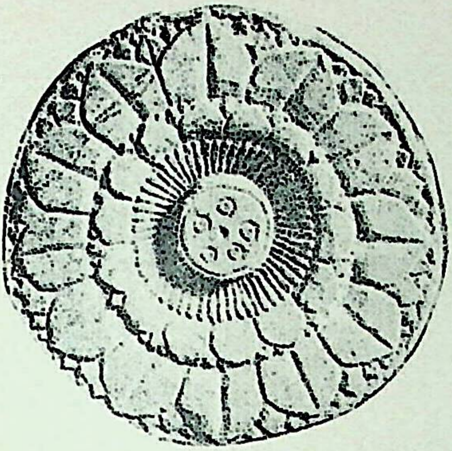
Lotus medallions taken from the pieces numbered as,

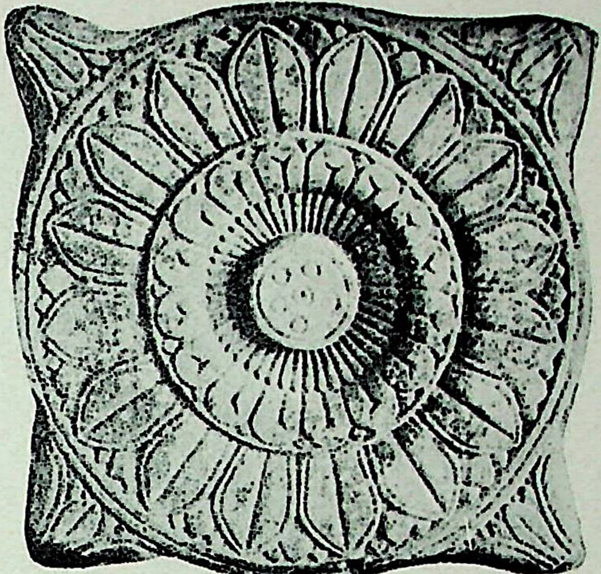
?	D 2837	J 470
J 443	J 468	J 388
L 21	no number	J 453

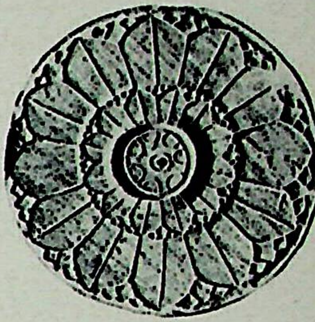
4

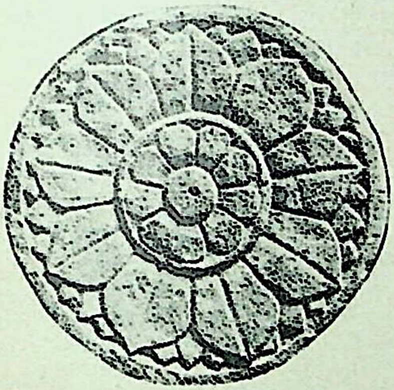
Lotus medallions taken from the pieces numbered as,

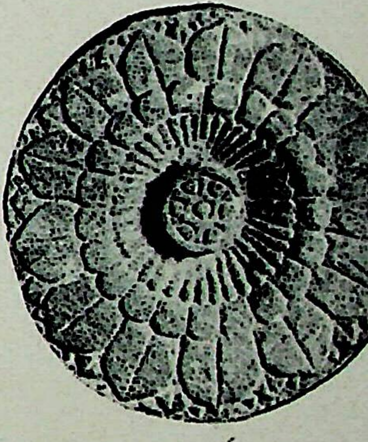
J 462	J 38	J 459
J 420	J 473	J 428
?		J 442
J 448	J 424	J 442











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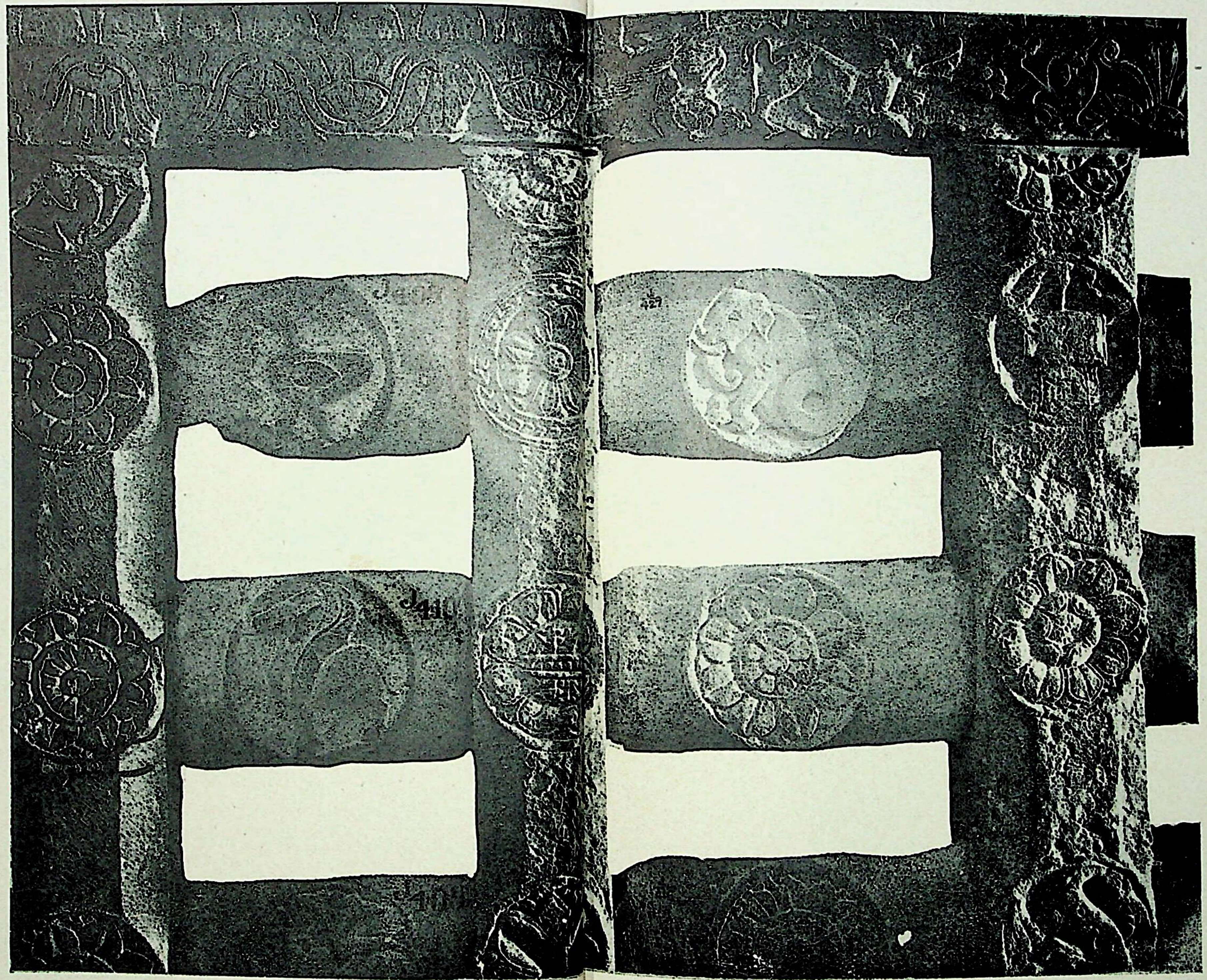
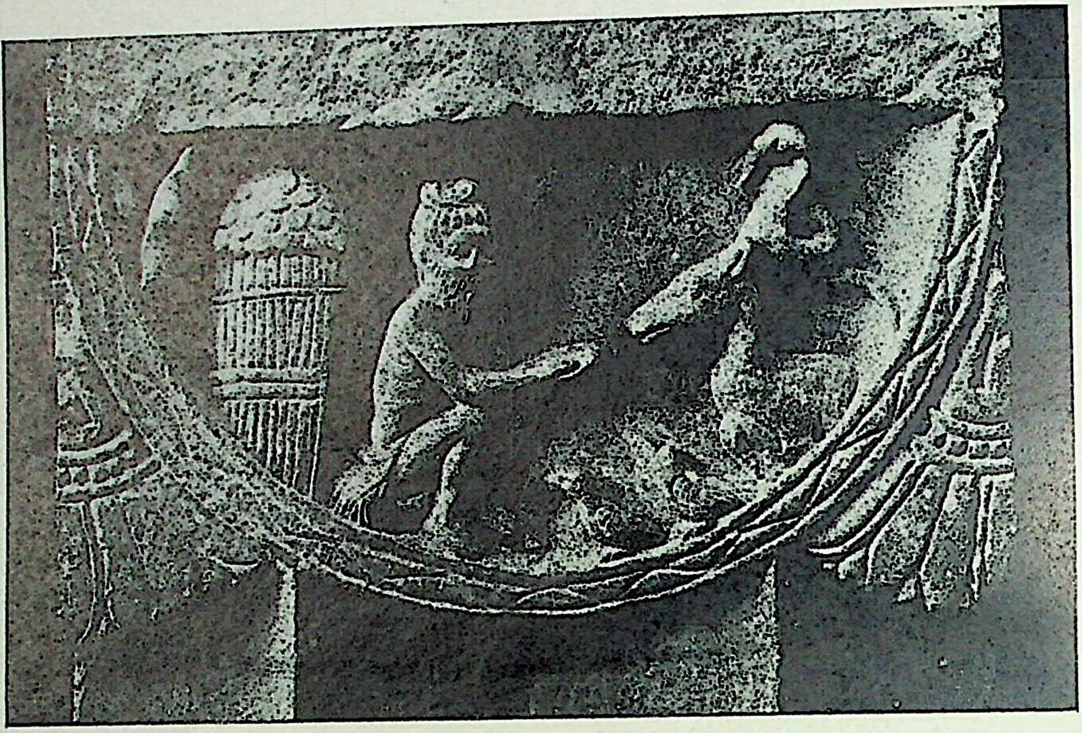


5 Details of the "Lotus Railing" as reconsted inside the Lucknow Museum. Śunga period.



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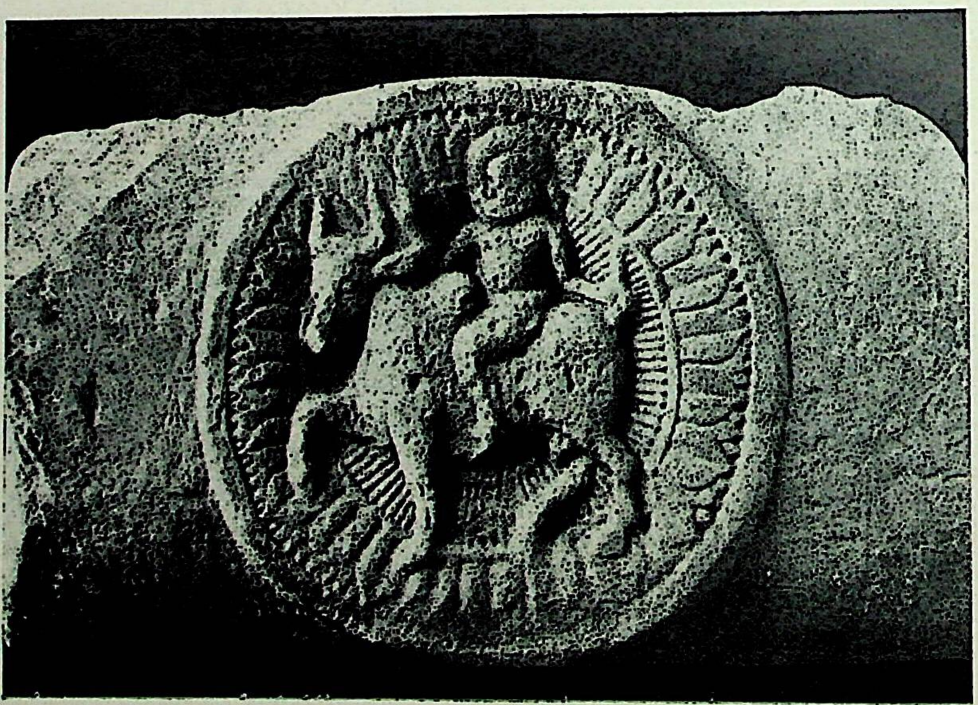

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6

Top medallion of a railing, carved with the 'Jataka of the Worst Evil'. "In the scene a Brahmanical anchorite wearing a scanty *valkala* as his loin-cloth and having the hair tied in a *jatajuta* and also a short beard, is seated on a kind of rolled-up mat (*brishi*) at the door of his round hut, the walls of which are made of reeds and the roof covered with leaves (*parnasala*). His left hand is placed on the left knee and the right elbow on the right knee, and the right hand is extended forward. He seems to be engaged in an earnest conversation with four wild creatures of the forest, viz., a coiled snake, a doe, a crow and a dove." (V. S. Agrawala, *Mathura Museum Catalogue*, Vol. IV, pp. 38-40). We owe the identification of the scene to Dr Foucher; for the complete story quoted by him see, JBORS, Vol. VI, 1920, pp. 470-73.

From Saptarshi Tila. Mathura Museum, 586. Full railing pillar 3′ 8½″ in ht., the medallion 1′ 11″ in diameter.

7

Cross-bar medallion, carved with the figures of a bull and a rider on its back. The virile bull-rider commands the incaparisoned animal by holding its tail with his left hand. Sunga period. Mathura Museum, 2322. Ht. 1′; width 1′ 11″.

8

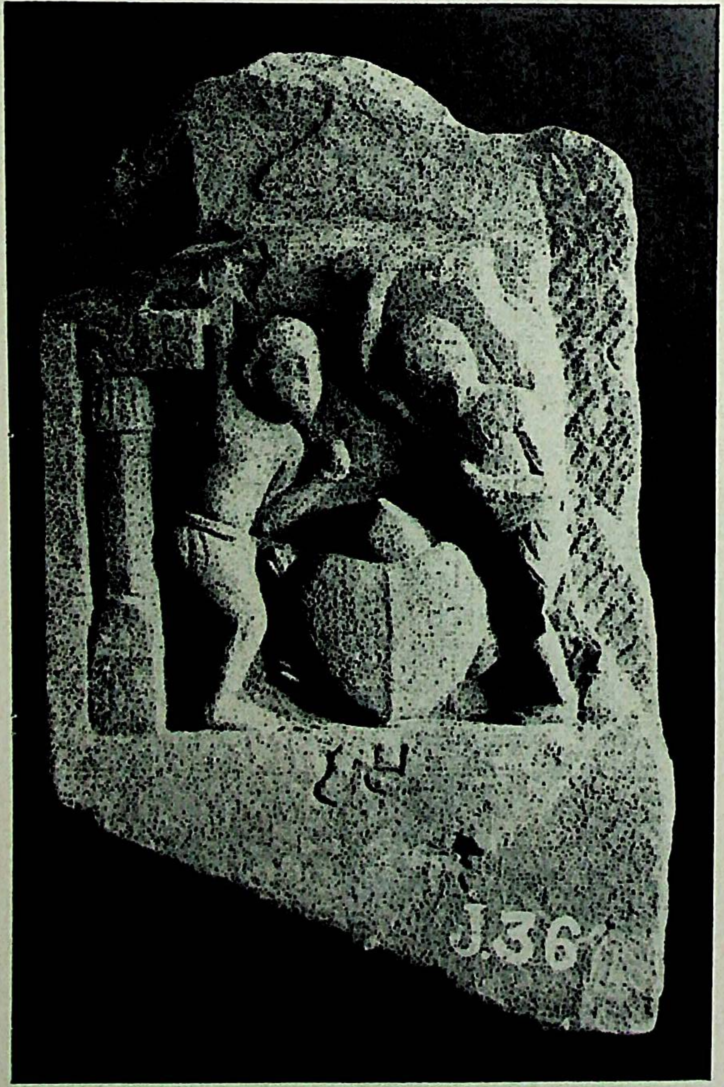
Fragment of a rail pillar, carved with a panel enclosed between two pilasters. In the scene two persons are shown killing a tortoise with sticks. It illustrates the 'Jataka of the Tortoise' of which the present rendering forms the concluding scene wherein the loquacious turtle met its end at the hands of two villagers who saw the poor creature fallen on the ground bereft of the wooden piece which it had held in its mouth as the two geese transported it in the sky.

Mathura Museum, J 36. Fragmentary, ht. 1′ 3″.

9

Fragment of a rail pillar, carved with a panel framed with side-pilasters. It depicts the 'Jataka of the Owl' *(Uluka Jataka)*, showing an owl seated on a stool and two monkeys consecrating it by pouring water on its head.

From Jamalpur Village. Mathura Museum, J 41. Fragmentary, ht. 1′ 2″.



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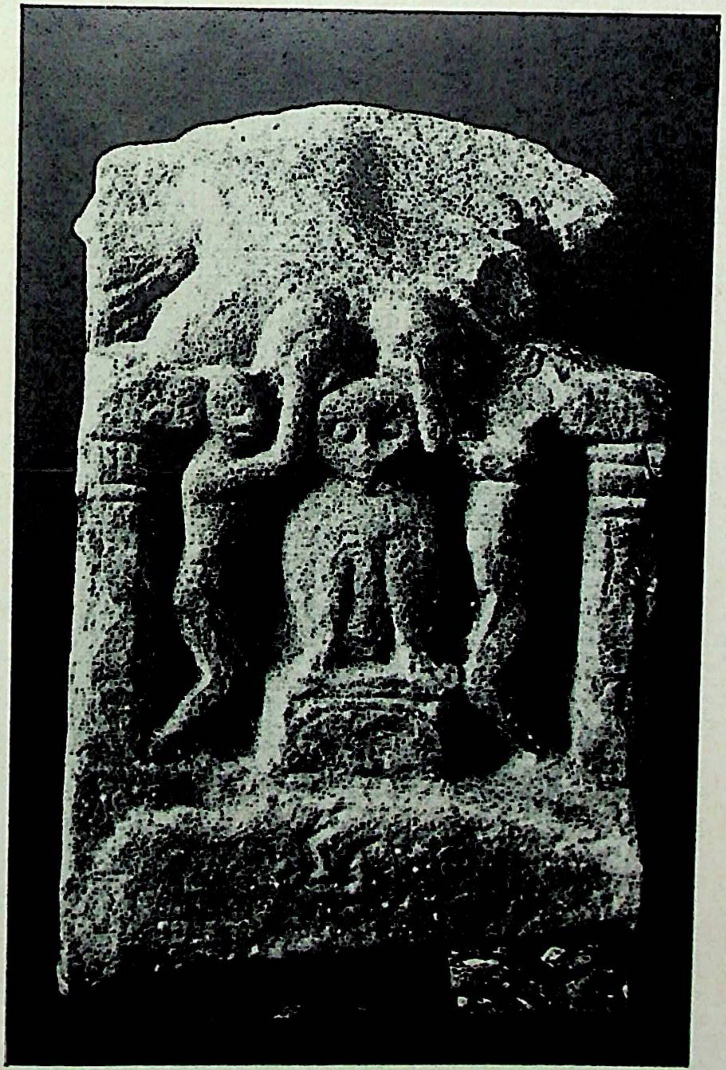

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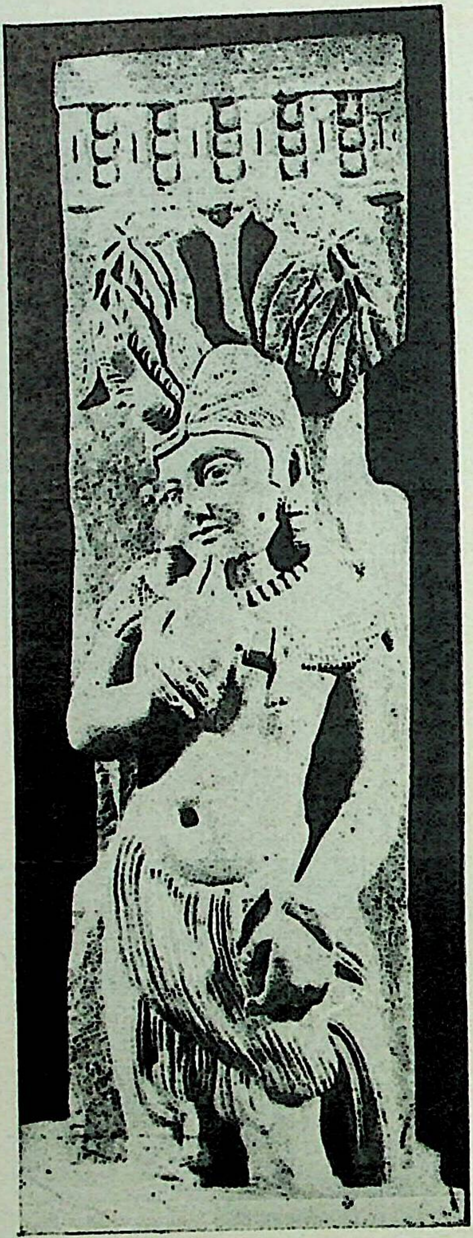


10

10

It shows a young male figure standing under a mango tree. He is wearing *valkala* drapery of a *brahmacharin,* several ornaments and the most remarkable is his horn-like projection on the forehead which led Dr V. S. Agrawala to identify the figure as that of Rishyasringa. The rolling eyes, beaming face and the attitude of surprise *(vismaya)* with the left hand placed against the thigh and the two fingers of the right hand placed on the chin, are the features which perhaps illustrate in stone the most striking moment in the story of Isisinga or Rishyasringa in which the young hermit got his first intimations of love. The story of Rishyasringa appears to be a popular one being met with several times in Pali literature and the epics; e. g. see *Alambusa Jataka* (No. 348), *Nalinika J.* (No. 326), *Aranna J.* (No. 348), *Haliddiraga J.* (No. 435), *Chullanarada J.* (No. 77), *Udanchani J.* (No. 106), *Mahabharata* (III. chs. 110-13), *Ramayana* (I. ch. 10), *Avadanakalpalata* (Pallava 65), etc. [See V. S. Agrawala, *Mathura Museum Catalogue*, Vol. IV, pp. 7-10 ; JISOA, 1936; *Studies in Indian Art*, pp. 160-61.]

From Chaubara Mound, Mathura. Mathura Museum, J 7. Fragmentary, ht. 2′ 7½″. See also Plates 11 and 12.

11

It shows a scene inside the palace of a prince who is illustrated here as enjoying the quail-fight. The person to the left is seated on a throne with ornamented back and his right leg rests on a *padapitha* placed in front of him. The other male figure accommodated on the right portion of the panel has before him a tray or basket in which two little birds are shown fighting over a fruit. In the background there stand two attendant figures. The two principal figures, one of whom on the left side appears to be a king or prince, and the other his intimate jester or *Vidushaka* friend, are depicted amusing themselves with a bird-fight *(vihaga-yuddha)* which was a favourite indoor pastime of royal and richly persons in ancient India. Similar depictions of bird fight are from Rajghat (V. S. Agrawala, "A unique terracotta plaque from Rajghat", *Prince of Wales Museum Bulletin*, No. 2) and Bhitargaon (AR-ASI, 1908-9, p. 10). See also R. C. Kak, "Cock-fighting in ancient India", *Illustrated London News*, Dec. 12, 1925 and the *Mrichchhakatika* (Act IV. 29 : inside a palace described there "quails are being egged on to fight"). For a classical description of the cock-fight, see also *Dasakumara charita*, II. ch. V.

Mathura Museum, J 7, detail of the middle panel on the reverse. On the obverse the figure of Rishyasringa is identified, see Plate 10. For the uppper panel on the reverse see Plate 12.

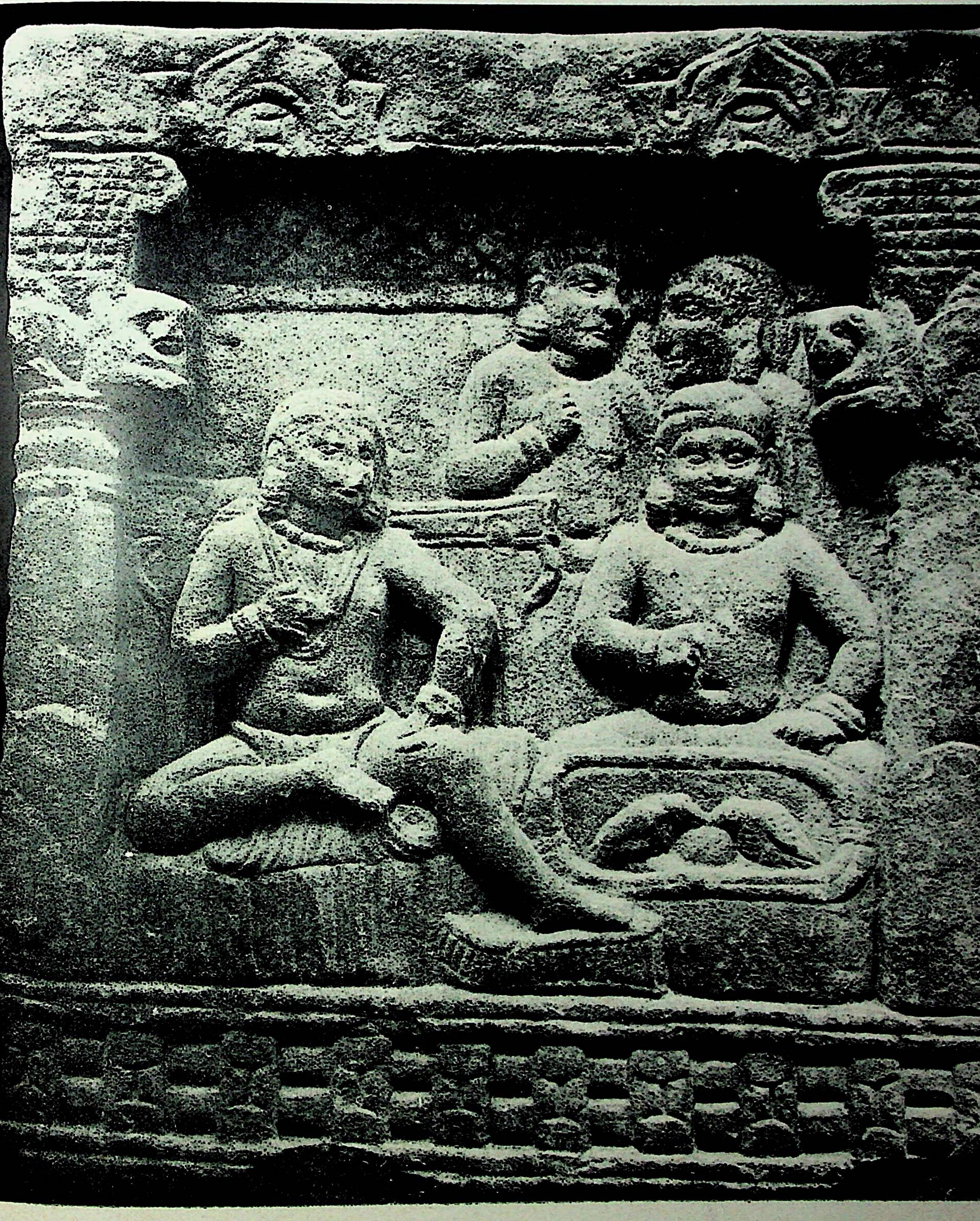
12

Architectural fragment, carved with a panel between two pilasters. A tree inside railing is being worshipped by two devotees. The person on the right is holding a *Chauri* in his right hand. The other votary on the left is shown perhaps with a piece of cloth which he appears to offer to the tree-divinity *(Vriksha devata)*.

C. 1st century B. C. It is from the reverse side of a pillar fragment, being the topmost panel carved in relief. The inscription beneath it reads : अभ्यंतरोपस्तायकस कठिकस दानं

"Gift of Kathika, the servant of the harem."

For the middle panel carved with the scene of a quail-fight, and the obverse figure see Plates 10 and 11.



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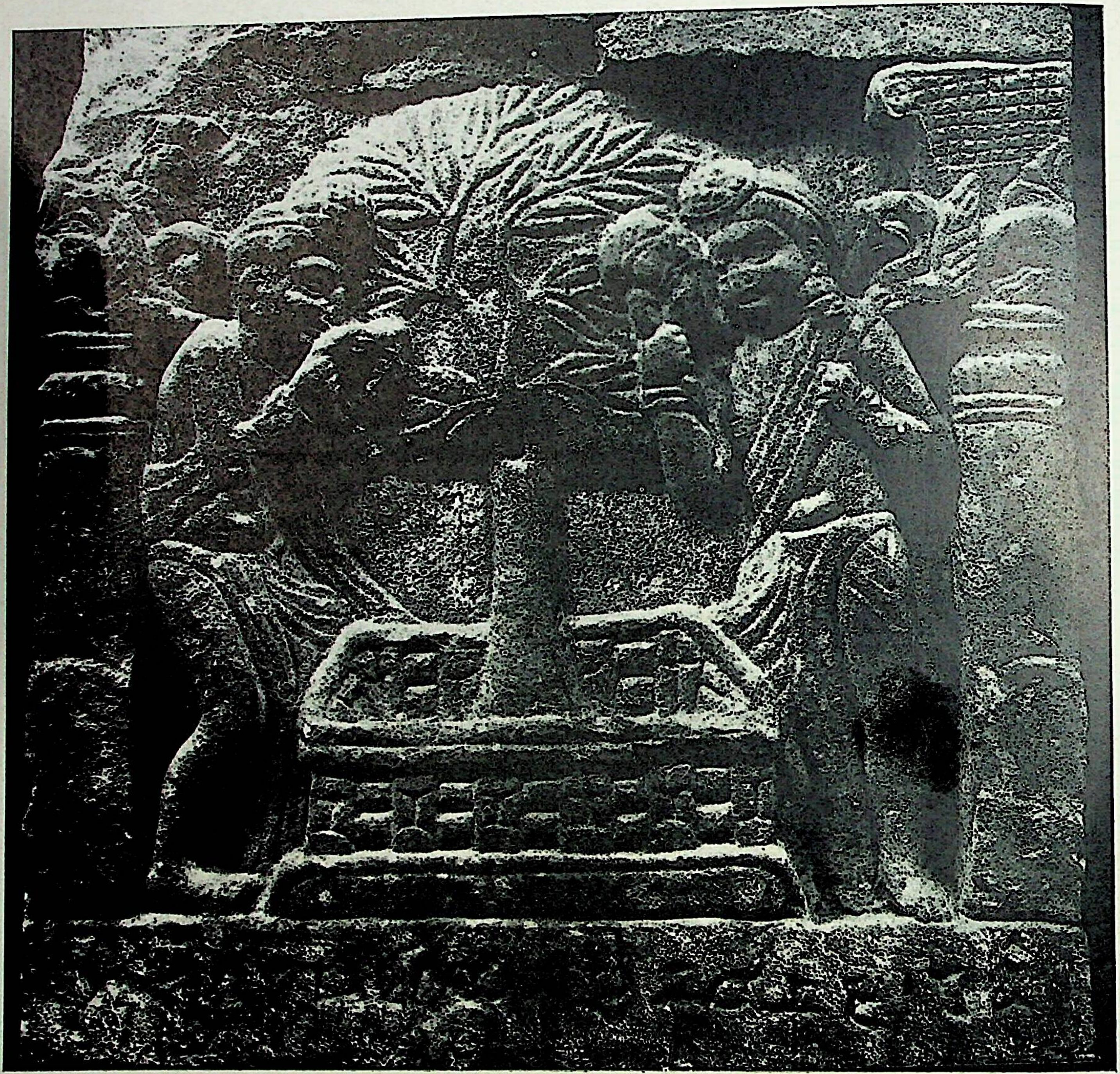

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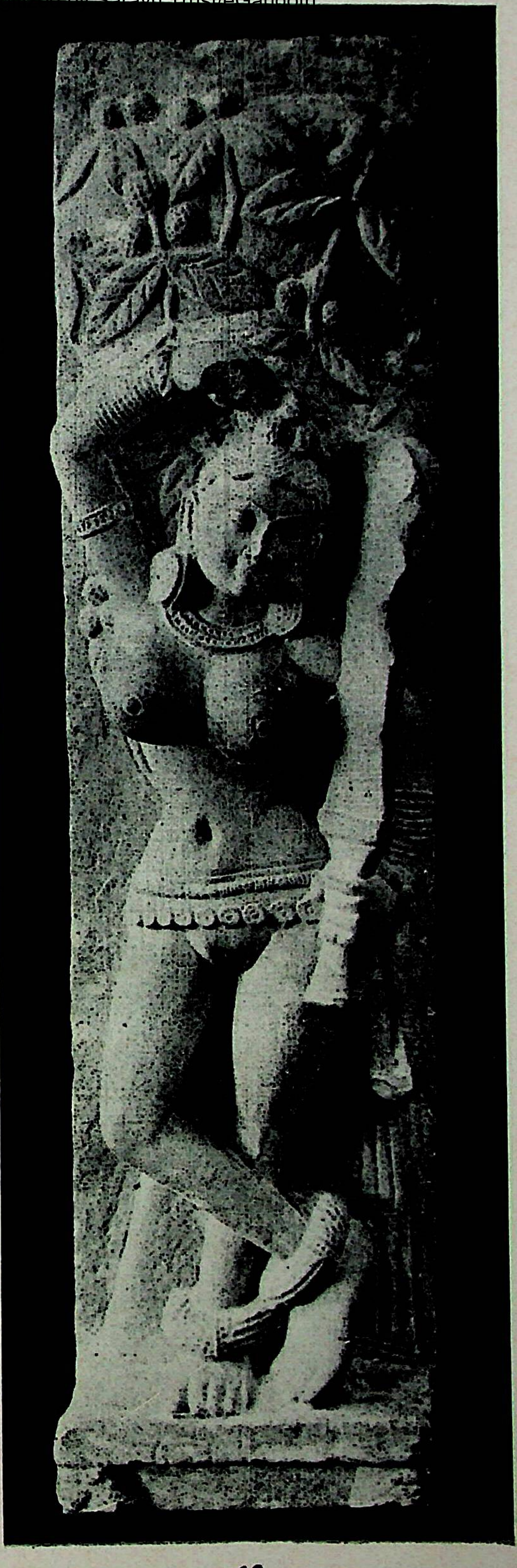

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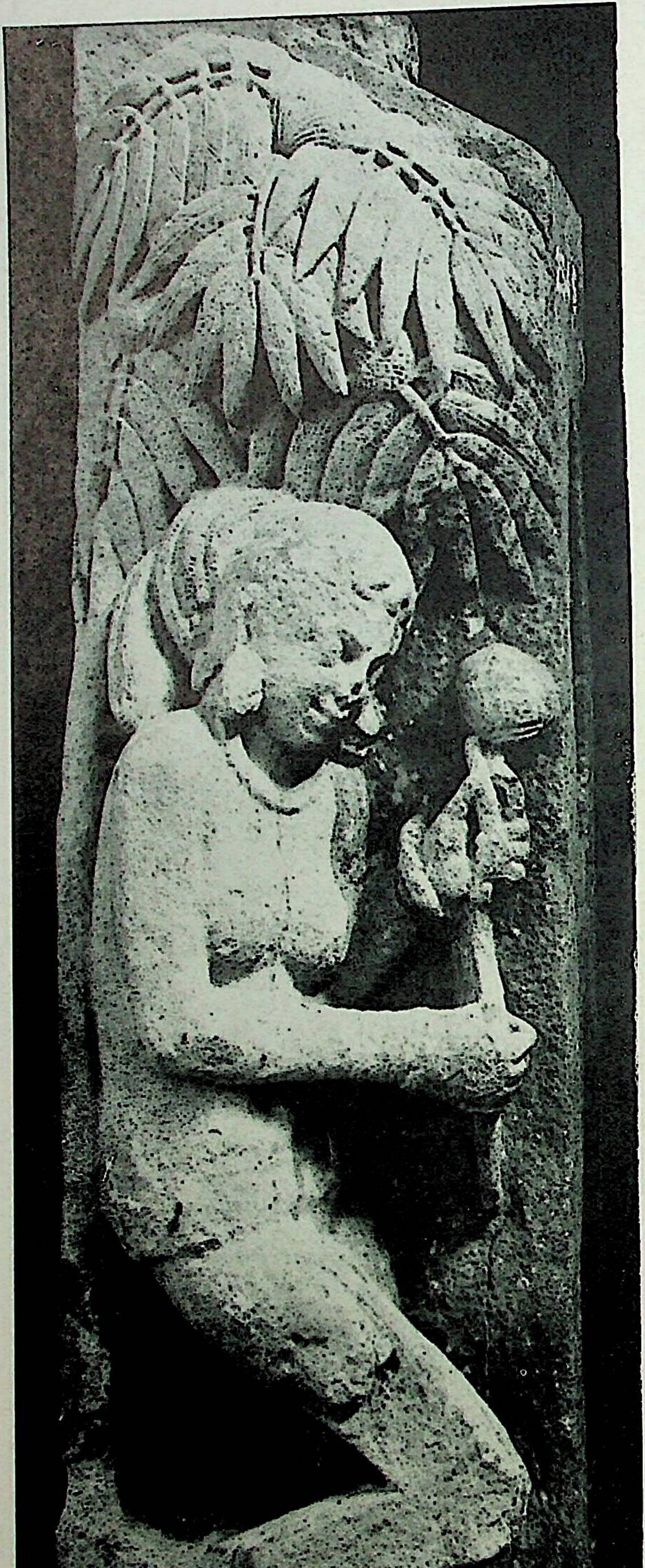


13

Railing pillar, carved with a female figure standing under a tree in graceful dramatic pose. She has a sheathed sword in the left hand placed near the girdle, and most probably represents the Amazonian attendant inside a harem demonstrating the sword-dance. This motif is several times depicted on Mathura railing uprights, e. g. J 63, 152, J 275, 2575.

The *Pratihari* female illustrated here (J 275) stands under a *Kadamba* tree and is brandishing a sword held in her left hand. The crossward posture of her legs and the right hand touching *Kadamba* blossoms above the head testify its being a sword-dance *(Khadga–nritya)*.

From Mathura, Lucknow Museum, J 275.

14

Railing pillar, showing a playful young girl holding in her two hands the stalk of a lotus flower. Above her head is carved dense foliage of an *Asoka* tree against the stem of which the female is standing. She touches the tree with her left foot and appears to be engaged in performing the *Asokadohadakrida*.

The figure is conceived in three–fourths profile, standing to right. Her back and the left leg rest softly against the stem of the tree. The head slightly looking downward with the attention of the eyes engaged by the flower–stalk held in both of her hands, and the overall bent of the delicate body accord an attractive harmony to the frame of the tree drooping as if with the burden of its blossoming in the form of flowers and leaves. The prominent hair–braid with its heavy make-up presents similarly a beautiful contrast to the thin body of the girl with lovely face and charming glances.

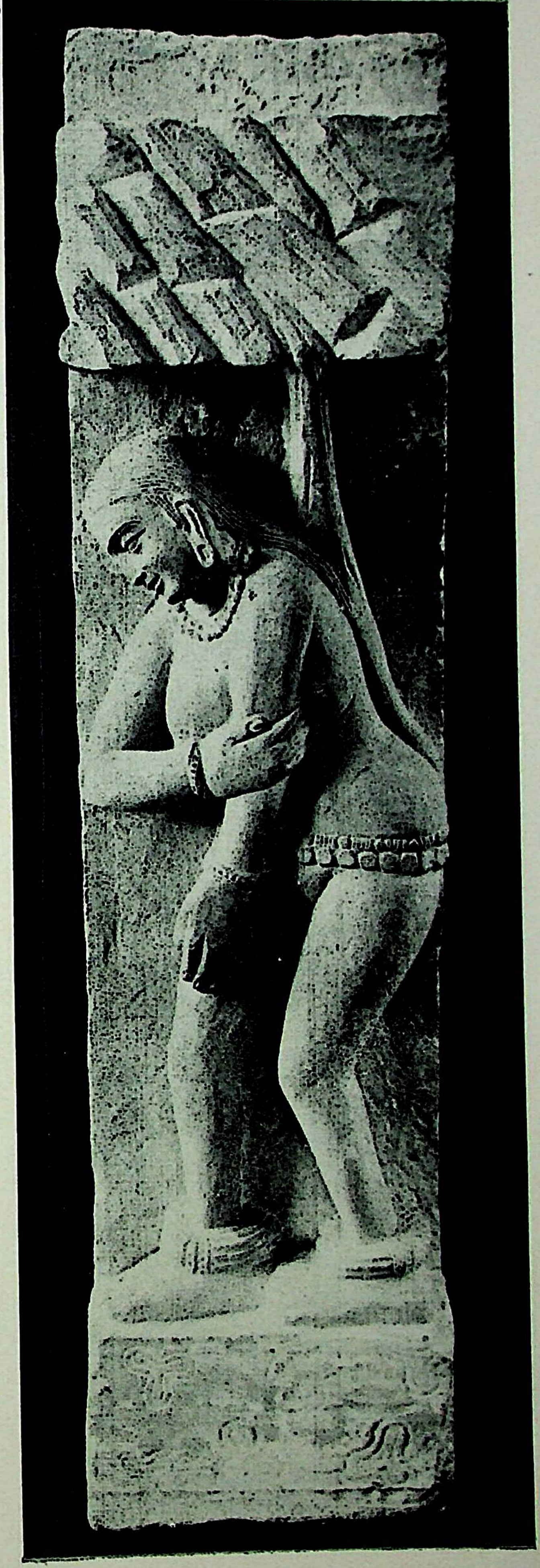
Mathura Museum, No. 2345.

15

Railing pillar, showing a young woman taking her bath under a water-fall. She is depicted in three-fourths profile standing to right, complete nude, under a projecting precipice and receiving on her back a stream of water falling in swift torrents. The water descending from the rock above is shown collecting below in the form of a pool.

Though otherwise fully nude she wears the usual ornaments in her ears, round the neck, in the hands, round the waist and on the ankles. This pillar is one of the finest specimens of Mathura sculpture in which the sculptor has attained every success in revealing the secrects and charms of a nude bathing beauty, truly with exposed lasciviousness and grossness of the flesh of a mortal feminine.

From Mathura, formerly Lucknow Museum, J 278, now in the National Museum, New Delhi.



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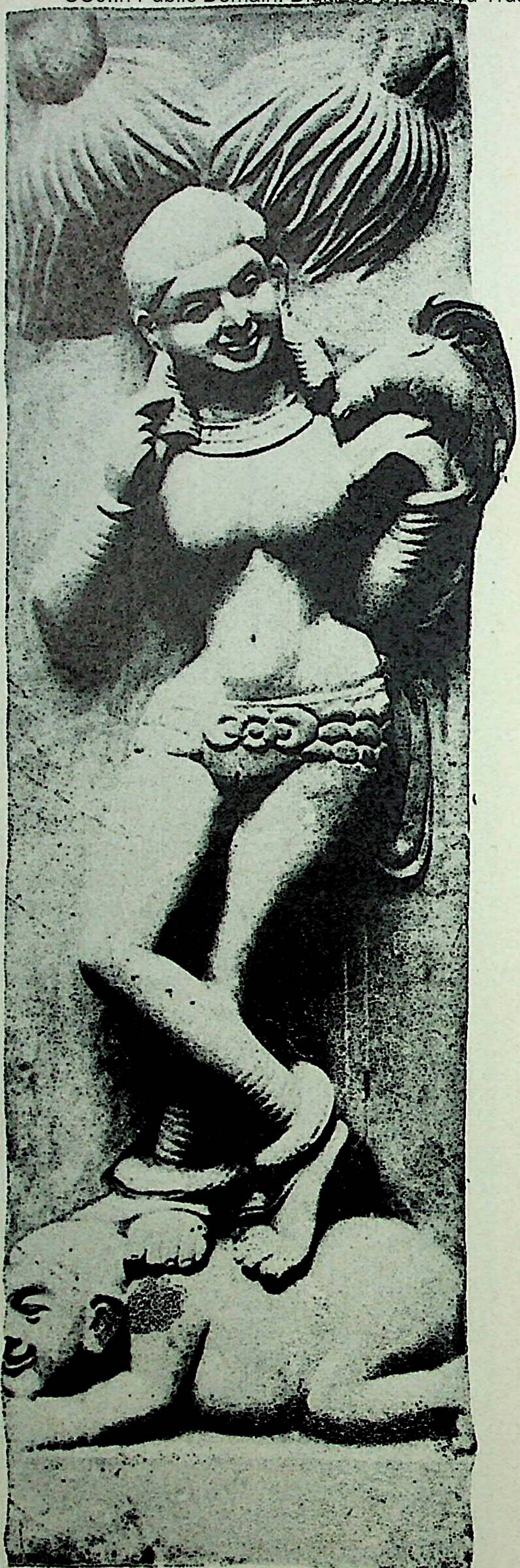


16

Railing pillar, carved with a beautiful damsel, a sportive *yakshi* figure well known for her beauty in literature. She stands on a kneeling prostrate dwarf in the graceful *tribhanga* posture and demonstrates the popular scene of *Suka-krida*. On her right shoulder is a parrot. With her right hand she is adjusting her ear-pendant. The diversion with a parrot is shown on a number of Muthura railing pillars, e. g. pillar Nos. 99, 115, 1307, 1595, in the Mathura Museum, and also with a cage, from Bhuteshwar tila and now in the Indian Museum (Vogel, *La Sculpture de Mathura*, pl. xix a), and B 92 in the Lucknow Museum in which the bird is seated on the girdle of the female and nibbles at the binding knot. (V. S. Agrawala, *Guide to the Lucknow Museum*, p. 10.)

This example is one of the best pieces of Mathura sculpture from the viewpoint of youthful warmth and beauty. It is again interesting for its combining the motif of mirror with that of the parrot. A mirror will be seen held in her right hand by looking into which the girl is adjusting her left ear-pendant with her left hand. The parrot seated on her right shoulder with a long tail and fluttering wings bites at the shadow in the mirror of the ear-ornament mistaking that for the fruit.

The female is loaded with heavy ornaments as on other railing pillars and wears transparent *sari*. "The heavy breasts, and the broad hips are depicted with all the grace the artist could command. The smiling expression of the face and the elegance of the whole body are very charming features that easily make this young woman a masterpiece of Mathura sculpture."

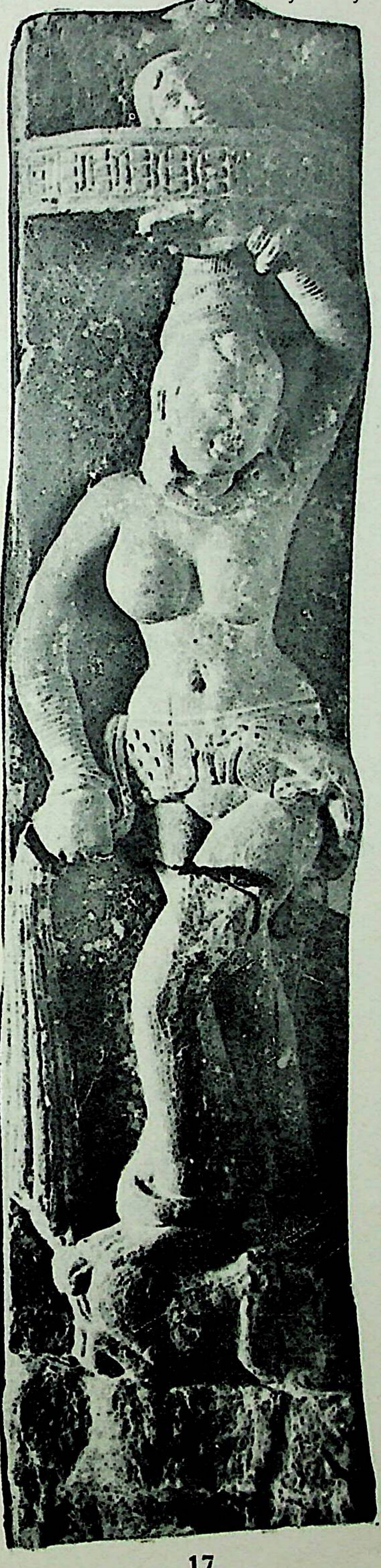
Mathura Museum, No. 258 ; ht. 2ft. 6 ins.

17

The young female is depicted in a dynamic pose of dancing. Her left foot stands firm to the back and the right leg is put forward balancing the movement of her body. In the mode of dance her left hand is thrown above the head while with the other she grasps the sash flowing down from the waist. The artist has captured with a remarkable success the ecstatic mood of the young dancer.

There is perched on her girdle a parrot which actually is conceived as nibbling at the knot of the ornament to unbind it. The parrot is the vehicle of the God of Love and by attempting to lose the undergarment of the girl as if draws her attention to the temptations of Kama that have made her dance in the trance of love.

From Mathura, Lucknow Museum, B 92.



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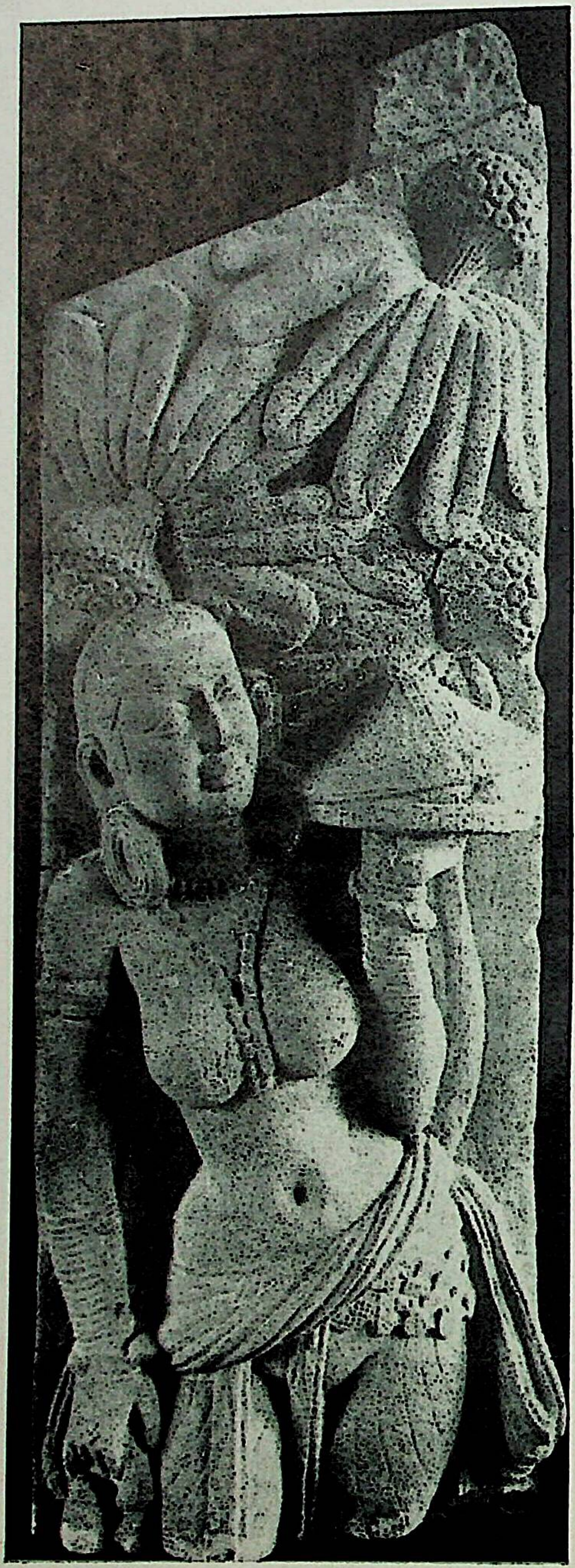


18

18

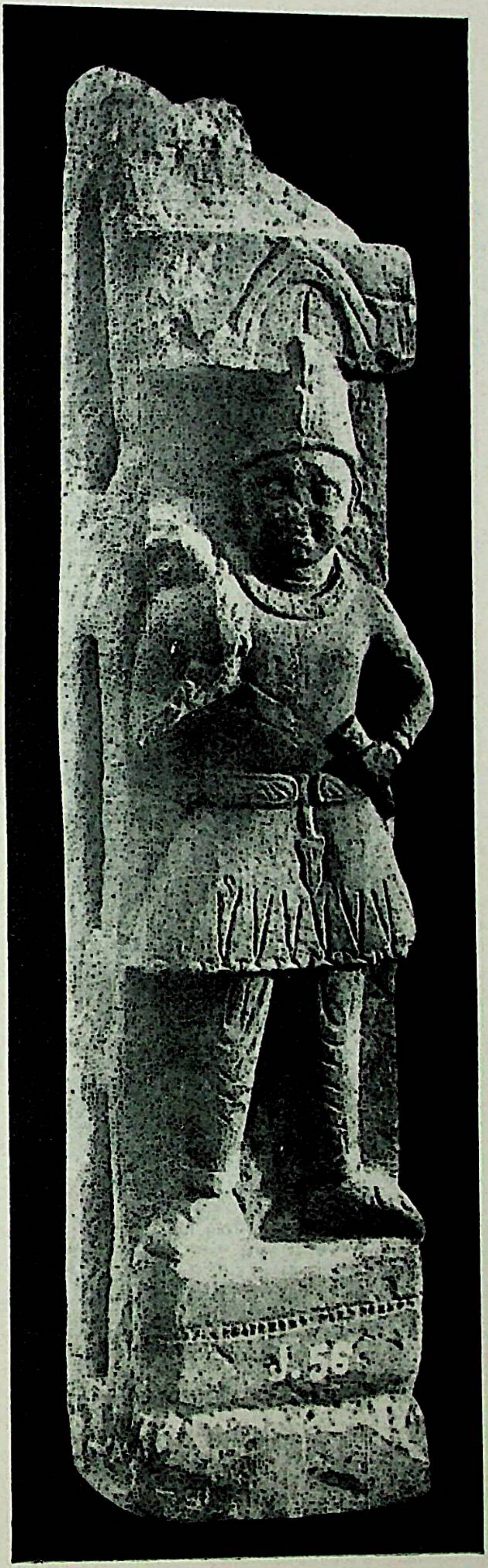
The attendant woman, carrying a jug in her suspended right hand and a covered basket on her left hand raised above the shoulder. She is profusely decked with ornaments and wears a *dhoti* heavy folds of which are shown in an artistic manner. On the upper portion of the pillar a cluster of flowers and foliage is carved with the same prominence as the whole scene.

From Kankali Tila. Mathura Museum, 369.

19

Railing pillar, carved with a standing male figure, clad in Indo-Scythian dress which consists of a high conical cap, a tunic, trousers and boots. The figure appears to be a Saka devotee holding a bunch of flowers and an indistinct object in his two hands. Such figures of foreigners are carved on a number of Kushana architectural pieces from Mathura.

From Katra Village. Mathura Museum, J 56.



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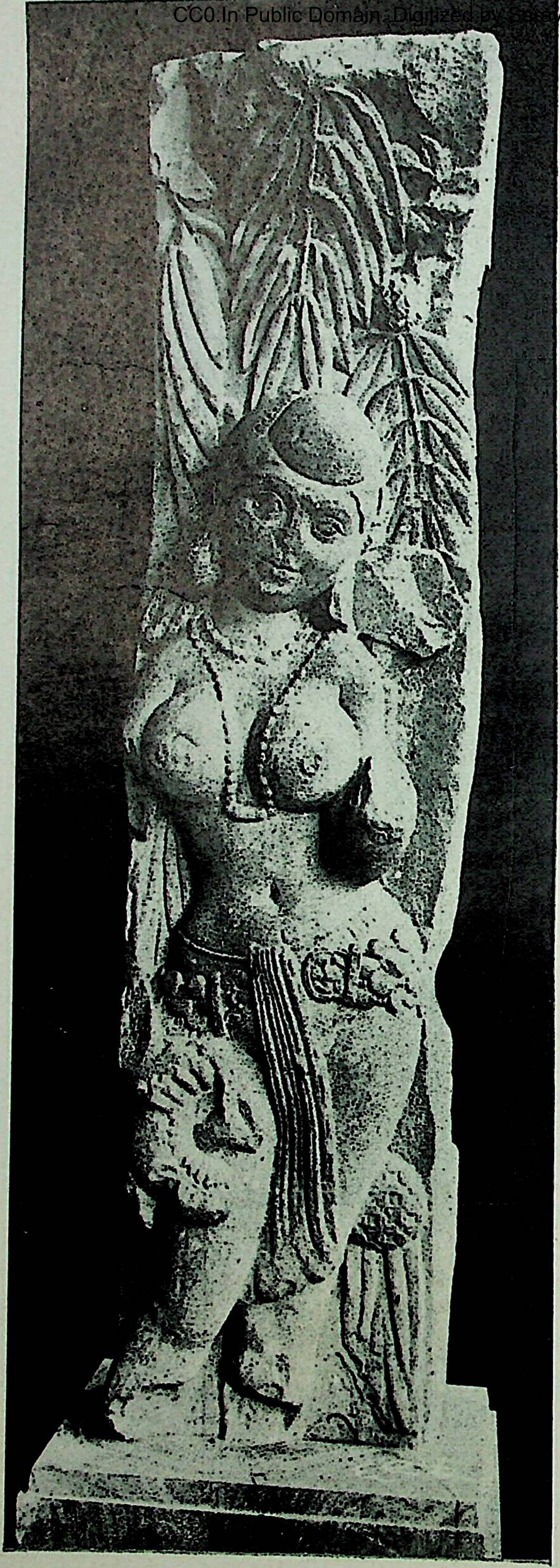


26

An attendant female standing under an *Asoka* tree which is denoted in the background, above, in the middle and below by long leaves and flowers. The female *paricharika* carries an earthen *surahi*-type pot in the right hand and the left one is broken from the wrist. For its charming expression on the face and fleshy tenderness of the body the figure reckons amongst the masterpieces of Kushana art.

Mathura Museum.

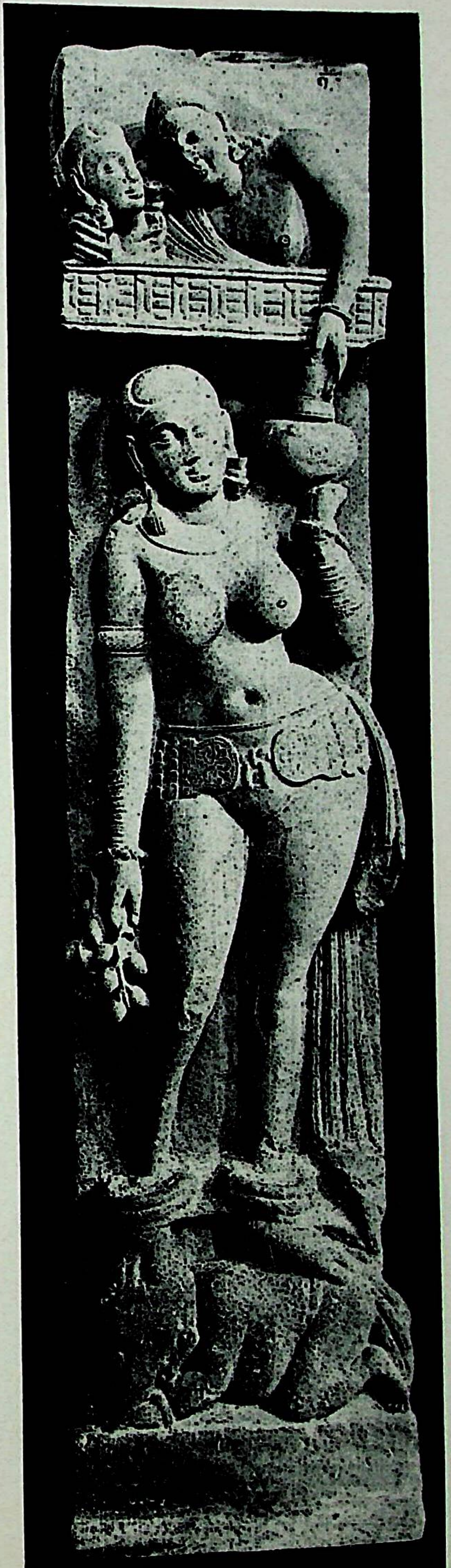
27

Front side of a railing pillar (4 ft. 4 ins.). It is carved with a female figure standing on a prostrate dwarf. She wears prominent ornaments and a transparent *dhoti* with hanging folds. In her right hand she has a branch of mango fruits and carries a jar covered with a mug on her left hand raised to shoulder. Above the balcony is seen a amorous couple, the male figure trying to uncover the jar, perhaps filled with wine. For details of the scene above the architrave, see Plate 28, next to the present one.

From Bhuteshwar, Mathura Museum, 151.

28

Detail of the upper portion of a railing pillar. From Bhuteshwar, Mathura. On the lower part is carved a charming female standing on a crouching dwarf and clad in transparent *dhoti*. She holds a branch of mango fruits in her right hand while with her left hand is carrying a big jar covered with a mug raised to her shoulder. The tumbler and the portion of the coiffure of the "yakshi" figure may also be seen in the reproduction, and the full figure on Plate 27. The balcony above contains the busts of a couple in amorous attitude; the male figure with his left hand extended below is grasping the mug on the jar. [Vogel, *La Sculpture de Mathura*, pl. XIX d; V. S. Agrawala, *Mathura Museum Catalogue*, Vol IV, pp. 30-1.]



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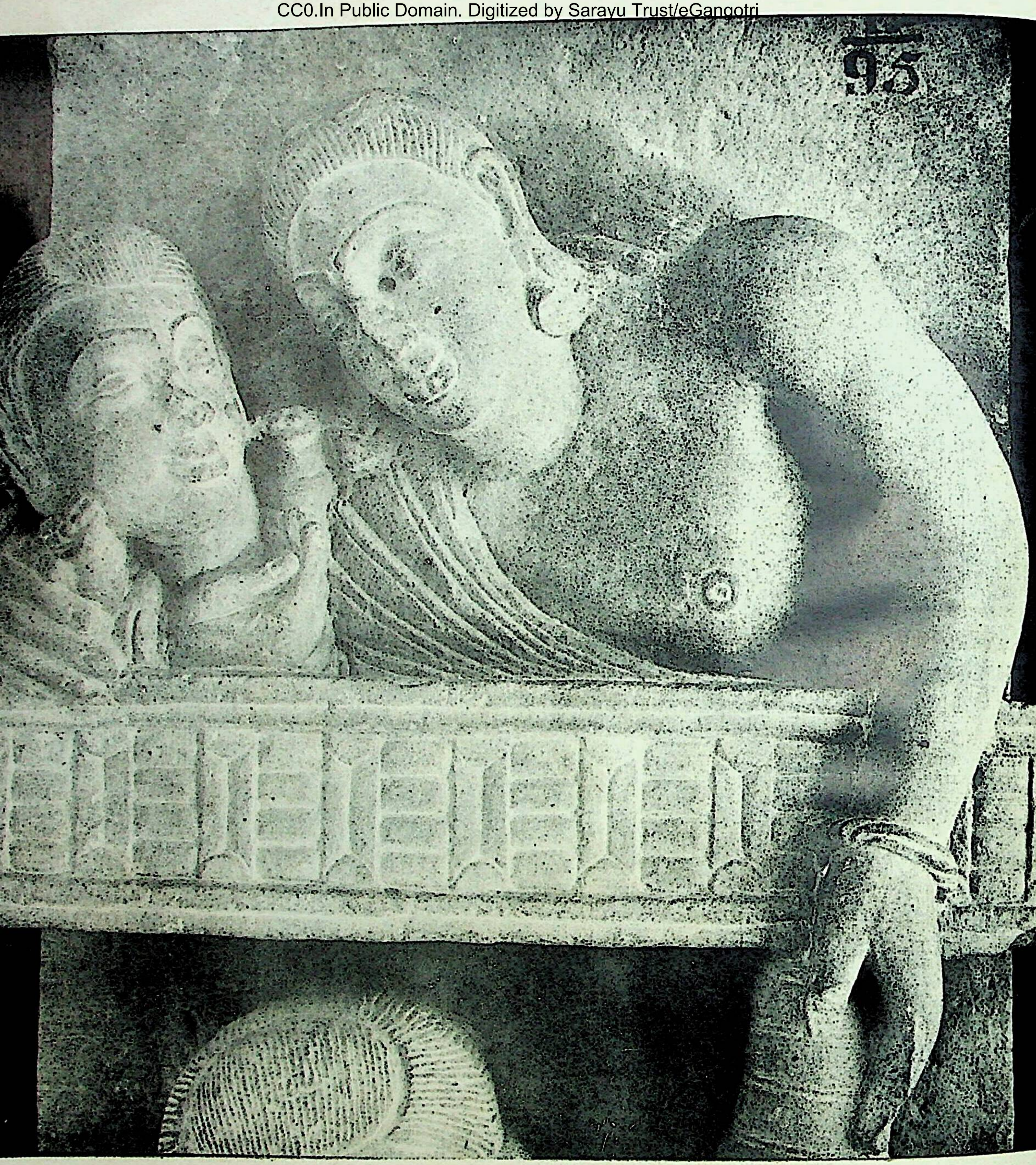
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The art of Mathura opens a field in the history of Indian sculpture, which is both instructive and appealing. Dr V. S. Agrawala gave a new direction to the study of Kushana sculpture of Mathura. He is no more with us, but I am happy to note that his son Prithvi Kumar Agrawala is following the footsteps of his illustriou father. The present work deals with the Mathura Railing Pillars and Prithvi Kumar has tried to give at times new explanations of the old motifs. I recommend this book to the connoisseurs for a critical appraisal

Dr. MOTI CHANDRA
Prince of Wales
Museum, Bombay.

3620

Indian Civilisation Series No. VI

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By Prithvi K. Agrawala

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